Salisbury University
Nabb Research Center
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Shoreline

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Freedom in Salisbury, Maryland

by Matt Griffin

Many Americans have heard of the National Archives and what it holds, but most will never visit these documents showing how Americans came to receive their freedom. This same thought crossed the mind of William Coblenz in 1946 while taking his lunch break in the Archives. Regretting the notion most Americans would not get to see the documents ensuring their freedom, he presented an idea to United States Archivist Solon Buck. Coblenz's idea came to fruition on September 17, 1947, when the Freedom Train opened to the public in Philadelphia, PA containing 127 historic documents.

Sponsored by the Department of Justice, conducted by the American Heritage Foundation and supported by private funds, the Freedom Train visited 326 towns and cities throughout every state, the only locomotive to accomplish this feat. Documents were sealed behind specially made plastic and glass for protection and archivists employed over 16 tons of ice daily to keep the humidity in each compartment exactly right. The American Heritage Foundation declared it ran the Freedom Train to heighten the awareness of American citizens of their individual rights and liberties, to augment their pride in the past, and to encourage more active participation in government by the average citizen.

There were certain requirements for the train to stop in a city or town. The first required communities to observe Rededication Week, where residents organized events to encourage citizens to think about the liberty guaranteed them in the United States. The second requirement held that there could be no component of segregation in the city.

Salisbury, MD, being the geographic center of the Eastern Shore, made an ideal stop for the train. Salisbury began its Rededication Week on Sunday, November 16, 1946, with individual church services stressing the idea that "Freedom is Everybody's Job." A veterans' torchlight parade was held on Tuesday, November 18, and a Youth Rally was held on Thursday, November 20, at the Maryland State Teachers College, now Salisbury University. Friday, November 19, was named Organization Day and set aside as a day to determine the best way Salisbury and Eastern Shore residents could see the train. Rededication week culminated when the Freedom Train pulled up to Union Station in Salisbury at 4 a.m. on Saturday, November 21.

At approximately 8:30 a.m., Salisbury Mayor E.R. White Jr. and 17 other mayors of the Delmarva Peninsula took a private tour of the Freedom Train. One hour later, Mayor White opened the doors to the public. People were so anxious to view these documents that, just like a moving train, it was nearly impossible to stop shuffling from one car to the next. The only requirement to view the documents was that viewers had to be at or above the age of 12 and be in sixth grade or above. Thirteen thousand people from all over Delmarva came to see the Freedom Train. That nearly doubled the population of Salisbury at the time.

Citizens who attended were treated to the most sacred items in United States history. The first car contained: Christopher Columbus' Letter of 1493, The Mayflower Compact, The Declaration of Independence, the 1783 Treaty of Paris, a draft of the Constitution with annotations by George Washington, the original Bill of Rights and Jefferson's Bill of religious Freedom. Car two contained: George Washington's Farewell Address, the original Emancipation Proclamation, Abraham Lincoln's draft of the Gettysburg Address, a letter from General Robert E. Lee and the Northwest Ordinance. The last car contained: Jefferson's letter on Freedom of Press, the Declaration of the United Nations, German surrender documents from World War II, Japanese surrender documents from World War II and six famous flags, including the one flown at Iwo Jima.

The closing of the Freedom Train and its departure marked the end of Rededication Week in Salisbury. It was the climax of an important week for many people, and the event would dominate the local newspapers for days. In a financial report from W. Newton Jackson, chairman of the Freedom Train Finance Committee there was $1,035 in public donations raised, with $757.83 being sent on to the American Heritage Foundation in an effort to keep the train traveling all over the country. By the time the Freedom Train returned from the tour on January 22, 1949, a grand total of 3,521,841 people had boarded the train and viewed its contents.

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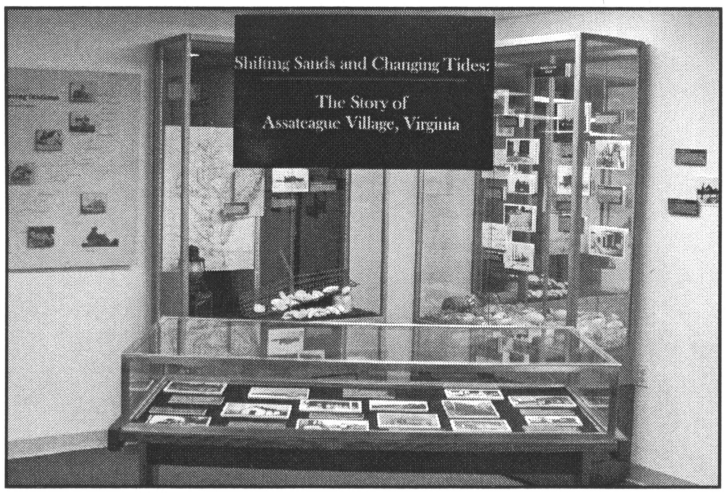
Closings:
Labor Day: September 1

"We're History... Without You"

Ongoing: Exhibit

"Shifting Sands, Changing Tides:
The Story of Assateague Village, VA"

The exhibit highlights the story of Assateague Village, VA, a small fishing community on the southern tip of Assateague Island. The village bloomed in the late 19th century and was inhabited until the late 1920s. The display highlights how technology in conjunction with natural resources both gave birth to and destroyed a small community on the Eastern Shore. The exhibit is designed to demonstrate the interrelation between our environment and our communities, and how changes to our environment have an impact on social structures.



21st Century Membership Correction

The Nabb Center offers its apology for inadvertent errors in printing the list of 21st Century Members in our June 2008 issue of the *Shoreline*. To make up for the omissions we acknowledge the following individuals:

Carolyn Ballou
Joe Ballou
Carole Bozman
Jane Bunting
Dave Burton
Betty Dawson
Henry Edwards Jr.
Robert Fondes
Tom Fooks
Richard Givens II
Thomas Hershey
Charles Jones
Robert Jones
Patricia Matl
Lloyd Matthews
Jean Mihalyka
Paul Morris
Eleanor Mulligan
Linda Nabb
Barbara Niemann
Edward Niemann Jr.
Kathryn Niskanen
Patrick Noonan
Dave Nutter
Austin Okie
Edward Perdue
Marion Phillips
Sandra Quillin
James Revell
George Riggin
Sarah Showell
Polly Stewart
Ray Thompson
Gordon Wood
Marelynn Zipser

Upcoming Events Around the Shore:

April-October 2008
Julia A. Purnell Museum Exhibit
Snow Hill, MD
Exhibits depicting religious life on the Eastern Shore. 410-632-0515 or www.purnellmuseum.com

Saturday, July 26, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
Chesapeake Folk Festival
St. Michaels, MD
Explore and enjoy first-hand Chesapeake foodways, traditions, demonstrations, music and crafts. Get your fill of foods from around the Bay, take a ride on a skipjack, imbibe wines from Maryland vineyards, meet our Chesapeake people and see how boats are restored in a working boat yard. 410-745-2916 or www.cbmm.org